

MENS INMOTA MOTA MANE

II Neoplatonic Tendencies in Augustine's Theory of the Passions¹

1. Augustine's Platonic Creed

In the *De vera religione*, Augustine states his adherence to a Platonic worldview in the following way: if we were to ask Plato himself, he would convince us that

"truth cannot be seen with the bodily eyes, but only with the pure mind. Any soul that would attach itself to the truth would attain happiness and perfection. Nothing hinders the perception of the truth more than a life devoted to lusts and the false images of sensible things, which, coming from the sensible world, are impressed upon us through the body, and which generate manifold opinions and errors." (*De vera relig.* III, 3).²

Thus, Augustine readily accepts the Platonic bipartition of the sensible and the intelligible world. The realm of the body yields lusts and false images, whereas the pure mind is oriented towards truth and perfection. The use of "us" (*nobis*) in this passage is noteworthy: the images of sensible things are said to be impressed upon us through the body. So the "us" does not include the body here, but rather the place where the images are generated – i.e., the soul, who can either attach itself to truth or be led astray by bodily movements.³ This is not to say that Augustine excludes the bodily existence from his notion of the human person. But what it does mean is that the soul is the seat of our perception. The body is thus seen as a mere instrument that hands over the impressions to the soul.

¹ For a meticulous study on the terminology concerning pleasure in Augustine, see T.J. Van Bavel, "*Fruitio, delectatio and voluptas in Augustine*", in *Augustinus*, 37 (1993), 499-510.

² Partly translated by Carol Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Oxford Theological Monographs), Oxford, 1992, 17.

³ This comes close to Plotinus's use of the word *ἡμεῖς*, with this restriction, that Plotinus does reduce the person to this "we". According to Plotinus, 'we' are in the first place 'the highest part of ourselves', i.e., the part of the soul that does not descend into the body – although the body does depend on this part: our soul uses it as an instrument (I 1, 3.3-4: *χρωμένη μὲν οὖν σώματι οἷα ὄργανον*). Although we cannot say that 'we' are devoid of corporeality, our body plays only a subordinate role and does not at all affect our essence. 'We', then, is a technical term, indicating the human soul in its highest realization (the 'higher' part of the soul which is its plenitude). All other human attributes are not 'we', but 'ours': they all depend in their proper way on this upper part (*Enn.* IV 4, 18.10-36; cf. I 1, 7.14-18).

Thus, the operation of the soul is different from that of the body, in this sense, that the body has its own way of being influenced by the external world, and that the vicissitudes of the body can only reach the soul in a modified way. They are translated, as it were, into a language which the soul understands.

That this is so, can be inferred from other texts, where Augustine argues that there is a difference between the things that reach our senses (sounds, views, tastes, etc.), and their *significatio*, which is grasped by the soul.⁴ The body simply undergoes the movements that attain the senses, whereas the soul actively takes them over and understands them. Hence, the soul's life is characterized by mere activity (*actio*), whereas the condition of the body is entirely and exclusively qualified as passivity (*passio*).⁵

This emphatic statement of the difference between corporeal states and the soul's active reaction to them leads to a peculiar paradox, highlighted by Etienne Gilson,⁶ which can be paraphrased as follows: if the soul is nothing but activity, how is it possible that it is influenced by the body? Does this not imply that at least the soul "undergoes" what is offered to it by the body? On the other hand, if the body is entirely passive, how is it possible that it influences the soul? Does this not imply a certain activity of the body, handing over its data to the soul?

This is a paradox every Platonist will have to face. Augustine was by no means the first to try and save the soul's autonomous operation in its interaction with the body. He was predated by the early Neo-Platonists, and particularly by Porphyry, who had an undeniable influence on Augustine's theory of sense perception.

2. Augustine's Theory of Sense Perception

Augustine expounds his theory of sense perception in *De quantitate animae* XXIII, 41-XXXII, 69, and in the sixth book of the *De musica*. Evidence from the later works shows that he remained true to this theory, although he added some important modifications.

The starting point of the theory is again Platonic: the body undergoes influences from the sensible world, which are taken over

⁴ *De quantitate animae* XXXII, 66; *De ordine* II, 34; *De Genesi ad litteram* III, V, 7.

⁵ This distinction underlies the entire discussion of *De musica* VI.

⁶ E. Gilson, *Introduction à l'étude de saint Augustin*, Paris, 1943 (2^{ème} éd.), 76.

by the soul. Plato himself qualified this overall scheme by adding that not every affect (πάθημα) of the body reaches the soul. Some παθήματα are too weak; they vanish in the body before being taken up by the soul, and hence, they are not perceived (Plato, *Philebus*, 33 d). This statement is made in the context of Plato's theory of pleasure: pleasure, he says, is the repletion of a lack, on the condition that the movement of the repletion is strong enough to be actually sensed. If the movement is too weak, then nothing is perceived, although the lack may actually be replenished. This theory of pleasure and perception has its own inherent problems, which the later Platonic tradition was eager to resolve. An important point was the simple connection between the quantity, or intensity, of the physiological movement and the pleasure which is felt as a consequence. Does replenishment have to be intense in order to be felt? We might just as well feel an enormous pleasure when a very small lack is being replenished (e.g., when listening to music: what kind of lack is involved there?).

Despite these problems, on which we will have the occasion to return, the underlying theory of perception has proven to be very influential in the later tradition. For it gives a clue on the independent operation of body and soul, and explicitly places sense perception in the soul. Moreover, it provides a model that explains why a corporeal movement does not necessarily cause alterations in the soul.

But what happens when a movement of the body does reach the soul? The Stoics elaborated a very systematic view of this process, starting from the central claim that the soul is ἀπαθής: it does not "undergo" anything. If the soul takes over a movement of the body, it does so by its own autonomous activity. When a mental impression presents itself as the result of the body's passively undergoing a movement, our soul becomes active. It *judges* (κρίνει) the bodily movements, deciding whether it approves or disapproves of them. This is what the Stoics called an "assent" (συγκατάθεσις): a practical judgment of reason on which the eventual performance of an action depends. A given assent results in an impulse (ὁρμή), which is defined as a 'motion of thought towards something or away from something'⁷.

⁷ SVF [= I. ab Arnim, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, Lipsiae, 3 vols., 1903-1905, *Indices* 1924] 3.92.4-5; A.W. Price, *Mental Conflict*, London/New York, 1995, 146. The first and most important impulse of living beings is the striving for self-preservation, which is directed towards that which is most proper, and thus most appropriate (οἰκείον) to them: SVF 3.178-189; Long-Sedley [= A.A. Long-D.N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 2 vols., Cambridge, 1987] 57D. This is a reaction against the Epicureans, who fostered the idea that the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain are the original impulses of all living beings.

If there are no external obstructions, then the action follows automatically and immediately upon the impulse (Sen., *Ep.* 113.18 [=SVF 3.169]). Thus, according to the Stoics, the soul performs its own operation of judging the movements, without being affected by them.

This Stoic doctrine was taken over by the Neo-Platonists, within the context of their peculiar view on the connexion of body and soul – stressing, of course, the soul's independent existence. Plotinus repeatedly discusses the question of whether 'affects' (πάθη) naturally belong to the body or to the soul.⁸ Plotinus' answer is that the soul must be completely 'ἀπαθής'. The seat of affects is the body, but not taken as such: a body in itself would never be able to experience any affect. It must be the body insofar as it is alive and ensouled, or "the body that wants to be not only body".⁹ The bodily affect cannot reach the (embodied) soul but in a modified form: the soul consciously perceives the affect, as a form of 'knowledge' (γνῶσις),¹⁰ without being affected itself.¹¹ To be sure, in the soul there can be no question of 'affects'. Plotinus indicates that perception (the sensitive soul) clearly is to be distinguished from affects: the former consists in 'activities concerning the affects', which are more precisely termed 'judgments' (κρίσεις), i.e., evaluations of the affects by a faculty of a different nature. For it would be impossible that the soul would be affected in the same way as the body:¹²

"For us, the pain of this body and the pleasure of this kind result in an unaffected knowledge." (IV 4, 18.9-10)¹³

Augustine's version of the doctrine is often classified as "Stoic". Indeed, it is very much influenced by Stoic thought (particularly by Cicero),¹⁴ but, as it may appear from the parallel texts in

⁸ The question is raised at *Enn.* I 1, and returns as one of the 'Difficulties about the soul' treated at *Enn.* IV 4. See also *Enn.* III 6 'On the impassibility of things without body' (Περὶ τῆς ἀπαθείας τῶν ἀσωμάτων), and IV 8 'On the descent of the soul into bodies' (Περὶ τῆς εἰς τὰ σώματα καθόδου τῆς ψυχῆς).

⁹ IV 4, 20.5-6: ὁ σῶμα μὲν ἐστὶν, ἐθέλει δὲ μὴ μόνον σῶμα εἶναι.

¹⁰ See the definition of pleasure and pain: *Enn.* IV 4, 19.2-4 (discussed below, p. ***).

¹¹ *Enn.* IV 4, 18.12-13: Πᾶσα δὲ ἡσθετο τὸ ἐκεῖ πάθος οὐκ αὐτὴ παθοῦσα. See also III 6, 3.17-19: Καὶ τῆς ἡδονῆς δὲ τὸ τῆς διαχύσεως τοῦτο καὶ εἰς αἴσθησιν ἦκον περὶ τὸ σῶμα, τὸ δὲ περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν οὐκέτι πάθος.

¹² III 6, 1.1-7; cf. H.J. Blumenthal, *Plotinus' Psychology. His Doctrine of the Embodied Soul*, Den Haag, 1971, 70.

¹³ Cf. III 6, 3.1-7; 16-19; 4.7-8.

¹⁴ See, e.g., J. Brachtendorf, "Cicero and Augustine on the Passions", in *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes*, 43 (1997), 289-308, who gives an excellent survey of the Stoic influences, and who also shows that Augustine's version of Stoicism is not always consistent. I believe that this exactly reveals the heart of the matter, viz., that Augustine's interpretation of Stoicism is mediated through Neo-Platonic doctrine.

Plotinus, this influence is subordinate to a much more important feature: Augustine's theory of perception is essentially Neo-Platonic, and the Stoic background is reinterpreted on a Neo-Platonic canvas – as it was the case in the Greek Neo-Platonic authors themselves.

In *De quantitate animae*, Augustine ventures to provide a definition of *sensus*. In a first move, sense perception is said to be the situation in which “the soul is aware of what the body is undergoing” (*non latere animam quod patitur corpus*). However, the discussion partners agree that there are things which the body undergoes, and which do not remain hidden to the soul, without however being called “*sensus*”. If we grow old, for instance, we know that we are getting older; this awareness is not a case of sense perception, but it is the result of an operation of our *ratio*. Hence, there is a need to reformulate the definition, excluding this kind of indirect awareness of bodily changes. The new definition states that “sense perception is an affect of the body which by itself is not hidden from the soul” (*sensus [est] passio corporis per seipsam non latens animam*). The “*per seipsam*” denotes an immediate reception of the corporeal movement in the soul, and thus excludes the type of indirect awareness that troubled the first definition.

This new definition does not solve all the questions: how about the opposition between the passivity of the body and the activity of the soul? The definition of *sensus* does not solve the paradox. And how is it possible that some movements are felt by the soul, whereas others are not? Is it only the intensity that counts here? In *De musica*, VI, Augustine offers a sophisticated answer to precisely these questions. The operations of the soul are based, he says, on a physiological process: in every sensory organ there is an element that corresponds (*similia similibus*) to the corporeal nature of the sensed objects: the eye contains something bright (*luminosum aliquid*), the mouth something wet (*humidum*), etc. On the basis of this likeness, everything goes well and calmly (*cum quiete*) as long as the senses are touched by things which correspond to their nature. But when sensible things do not correspond to the natural quality of the sensory organs, they cause an alteration (*alteritas*) of the body, and in this case, the soul concentrates its attention to this influence:

“At that moment, it is said that the soul sees, hears, smells, tastes or feels by touching; by these activities, it gladly associates with things appropriate to it, and painfully resists to what is not appropriate. These, I think, are the operations which the soul exhibits over against affects of the body, when the soul senses, without, however, undergoing the passive states themselves.” (*De mus.* VI, V, 10)

This is an interesting passage, as it limits the range of sense perception to the soul's feeling something strange, something which does not fit with the proper nature of the sense organs. The consequence must be that, if our constellation is at ease, without any disturbance, we do not sense: everything is going smoothly and easily, and there is no attention of our soul required.¹⁵ This may seem rather odd at first sight, but again, the Platonic background may help to elucidate this point.

In the *Philebus*, on the basis of the idea that not all influences are heavy enough to be actually sensed, Plato argues that, although there will always be lacks and replenishments, we sometimes attain a condition in which none of the lacks or of the replenishments are actually felt. They are present, of course, but they are all too small to be sensed. Plato calls this the "neutral condition" (οὐδέτερος βίος) in which we have neither pleasure nor pain (*Philebus* 42 c – 44 a). This is not to say that in this situation, we attain perfect happiness: in fact, it is essential to note that it is a state without any pleasure, and Plato points out that taking this state to be a pleasure (because of the absence of pain) is a form of having false, erroneous pleasures. What does happen in this condition is that we just arrive at a situation without any felt disturbance. Our lacks and replenishments are going on, says Plato (referring to Heraclitus' adagio of πάντα ῥεῖ): our nature is involved in a permanent flux of lack and repletion, but for a while, we do not notice them. We reach a state of contentment, a short pause of the conundrum of pleasure and pain. As opposed to many others, and in particular Epicurus, who will later argue that any absence of pain is a pleasure per definition, Plato accepts a middle state in which we do not sense at all. I just had a good meal, my hunger and thirst are over (of course they will come back, but I do not feel this at the moment), I do not have any pain in the body, etc. I am just at ease. In this case, I do not sense, because there are no physiological movements that reach my soul.

Augustine is in line with this Platonic concept of a "neutral state", and, as a consequence, with the statement that any sense perception is either a pleasure or a pain: if felt, the movements of lack

¹⁵ *De mus.* VI, V, 13: *sicut est affectio corporis quae sanitas dicitur: nulla quippe attentione nostra opus habet, non quia nihil tunc agit anima in corpore, sed quia nihil facilius agit.* Cf. *Ibid.*, VI, V, 15: [talking about the difference between absence of perceptions in trees, and absence of perceptions in our "neutral state"] *Aliud est enim summa stoliditate, aliud summa sanitate corporis nihil sentire. Nam in altero instrumenta desunt, quae adversus passiones corporis moveantur, in altero ipsae passiones.*

and replenishment always yield either pleasure or pain. The soul exerts its operations as a reaction to the affects of the body; those operations, Augustine says, yield pleasure when the soul can accept the affects, and they yield pain when the soul resists to them.¹⁶ Or, in other words: pain occurs when the soul is aware of an external disturbance, whereas pleasure is the awareness of the return of that which is in accordance with nature.¹⁷

Augustine's account, however, contains an important extra point, which does away with one of the aforementioned difficulties in Plato's theory: is there an automatic correspondence between the intensity of a movement and our feeling it? In Plato, a movement is felt, and must be felt, if it is intense enough to attain the soul. But if so, how is it possible, for instance, that we are caught and disturbed by a small pain, say, in our finger, whereas a lack which is far greater, say a cancer, sometimes is not detected or felt? Or, conversely, how is it possible that an intense pain in our finger sometimes does not disturb us for a while (e.g., when we are occupied by other businesses)? In Plato, the perception remained too tightly bound to a physiological explanation, which did not allow to account for situations in which feeling pleasure or pain is not just a matter of the intensity of the bodily movements. But the later tradition provided an answer to this problem. Plotinus made an important step, when he stated that the soul takes over the movement of the body in an ἀντίληψις (which is mostly translated as "consciousness", but which actually means "taking over", like when relay racers take over the stick). By this ἀντίληψις, Plotinus says, "the soul understands (συνιείσῃς) the quality that is present in the bodies, and takes up the forms of them (αὐτῶν, i.e., of the bodies) in itself" (Plot., *Enn.* IV 4, 23.1-4). Thus, Plotinus combines the Aristotelian notion of abstraction (in which the soul takes over the forms)¹⁸ with the Platonic the-

¹⁶ *De mus.* VI, V, 12: *Hae sunt operationes quas adhibet anima praecedentibus passionibus corporis; quae delectant eam associantem, offendunt resistentem.*

¹⁷ *De mus.* VI, V, 9: *Corporalia ergo quaecumque huic corpori ingeruntur aut obiciuntur extrinsecus, non in anima, sed in ipso corpore aliquid faciunt, quod operi eius aut adversetur, aut congruat. Ideoque cum renititur adversanti, et materiam sibi subiectam in operis sui vias difficulter impingit, fit attentior ex difficultate in actionem; quae difficultas propter attentionem, cum eam non latet, sentire dicitur, et hoc vocatur aut dolor labor. Cum autem congruit quod infertur, aut adiacet, facile totum id vel ex eo quantum opus est, in sui operis itinera traducit. Et ista eius actio qua suum corpus convenienti extrinsecus corpori adiungit, quoniam propter quiddam adventitium attentius agitur, non latet; sed propter convenientiam, cum voluptate sentitur.*

¹⁸ The "qualities" mentioned in the text are the accidental forms.

ory of reminiscence: the soul being ἀπαθής, there is no direct link between the sensible forms (that are present in the sensible things) and the forms that are activated in knowledge. The mediation between them is procured by the sensory organs, which are corporeal, but which contain an intelligible part as well.¹⁹ In any case, this taking over by the soul is essentially a task of cognition (γνωρίζειν).²⁰ Almost in passing, Plotinus remarks that this ἀντίληψις of the soul implies a certain attention (προσοχή) of the soul:

“Sense-perception knows the image (and the soul starts from the image), and either provides what is desired – it is its function to do so – or resists and holds out and pays no attention either to what started the desire or to that which is desired afterwards” (*Enn.* IV 4, 20.18-20).

A strained attention is necessary in order to be able to have a proper understanding of the things perceived.

These incidental remarks of Plotinus were taken over by his pupil Porphyry, who gave the προσοχή a technical meaning, not just as something that is important in sense experience (as it was the case in Plotinus), but as one of its constituent parts.

In his *De abstinence* (a tasty treatise on the abstinence from eating meat), Porphyry argues that no one can successfully escape from the lure of this world by resisting the temptation. Someone, for instance, who is painfully occupied by a healthy diet, actually shows that he/she is too much attached to eating and drinking.²¹ What we should do, is to pay no attention at all to things that might lead us astray:

“The person who has deviated from intellect is in the very place where he turned aside: he runs hence and forth with the attention (προσοχή) of his apprehension (ἀντίληψις), and where the apprehension is, he is. It is one thing not to pay attention to the perceptibles because you are concerned with other matters, another for someone who is paying attention to them (ἐφιστάντα) to think he is not present.”²²

¹⁹ *Enn.* IV 4, 23.20-49.

²⁰ Cf. *Enn.* V 1, 12.12-14: “Cognition arises when there is a handing over (μετάδοσις) and a taking over (ἀντίληψις). If then there is to be a taking over (ἀντίληψις) of what is presented in this way, we must turn our power of apprehension inwards, and make it attend (τὴν προσοχὴν ἔχειν) to what is there.”

²¹ Porph., *De abstin.* I 38.

²² Porph., *De abstin.* I 39 (trans. Clark, thoroughly modified). There is a textual problem here: ἐφιστάντα (translated as “someone who is paying attention to them”) is the reading of the Valentinus edition 1655; the mss. read ἀφιστάντα (meaning “someone who stands aside”, trans. Clark). I prefer ἐφιστάντα, because it precisely illustrates what has been said about those who are eager to follow diets etc.: they are trying to cope with passions, by paying particular attention to them. But that is exactly what Porphyry wants us to avoid: we should pay no attention to them at all.

So the direction of our attention is decisive for the way in which we are susceptible for the influences of the external world. Moreover, the passage quoted intimates that an ἀντίληψις is impossible without any kind of προσοχή. Thus, the notion of attention gets the status of a formal element in the theory of perception and action.²³ The advantage of this is that it becomes possible to explain that a wise person (in the Stoic sense of the word) can be present in the corporeal world, without giving up his/her indifference to the influence of lower nature. One can have an ἀντίληψις of passions, without necessarily surrendering to them.

This Porphyrian προσοχή, or *attentio*, is literally taken over by Augustine in his *De musica*:

“But when those things occur which affect the body with a kind of alteration, so to speak, then the soul exerts more attentive actions, adapted to the different parts of the body or the sensory organs.” (*De mus.* VI, V, 10)

The entire discussion of sense perception hinges on the attention of the soul: a disturbance of the body is only felt if the soul pays attention to it, if it exerts *attentiores actiones*. The *attentio* is the condition for sense experience: if the soul is unattentive to a certain bodily movement, then it is not felt.

“To cut things short: my view is that when the soul senses something in the body, it does not undergo anything from it, but it pays a particular attention to the affects. These operations, which are either easy (when the affects are in accordance with nature) or difficult (when they are contrary to nature), do not conceal the soul. That is the entire account of what is called ‘to perceive’.”²⁴

3. The Passions

As we have seen, the Platonic-Augustinian account of sense perception starts from the irreducible distinction between the activity of the soul and the passivity of the body. Until now, we have taken this distinction between *actio* and *passio* in a merely descriptive or neutral sense: the perception of the soul presupposes a movement in

²³ Cf. also *Ibid.* I 41.

²⁴ *De mus.* VI, V, 9-10: *Et ne longe faciam, videtur mihi anima cum sentit in corpore, non ab illo aliquid pati, sed in eius passionibus attentius agere, et has actiones sive faciles propter convenientiam, sive difficiles propter inconvenientiam, non eam latere: et hoc totum est quod sentire dicitur.*

the body, which is a *passio* (translated as "affect"). But the terminology is not that neutral. In fact, it is needless to say that in the standard philosophical use, the word *passio* is not merely that which the body undergoes, but normally denotes a morally bad movement, which overcomes the rational soul and leads it astray. The same can be said of the *attentio*: although, as we have seen, every perception requires attention, not every attention is morally equivalent. There is a clear scheme of good and bad orientations of attention underlying this seemingly neutral description. Thus, the terminology of *passio* (and *attentio*) never is just descriptive (indicating any movement that the body undergoes); it always entails a normative qualification (indicating those movements from which we have to stay away).

This morally negative qualification of the passions was stressed by the Stoics, who claimed that they should be eradicated in order to attain the good life. In their view, passions are wrong assessments of corporeal movements, which are taken to be good and choice worthy, where in fact they are bad or indifferent. Our approval of them rests on a wrong judgment, the effect of which is that our reason is overwhelmed by the unreasonable movements. The wise man will be able to avoid these passions, since his assessment of impulses is always correct: he rightly takes something bad as bad, something good as good, and something indifferent as indifferent. Of course, this analysis does not mean that the wise person will never experience the physiological movements that may pave the way for the passions, like pleasure or pain. The wise person is he or she who is able to feel pleasure without losing the right rational control over one's deeds, i.e., without allowing this pleasure to become a passion. Indeed, some pleasures are unavoidable even in the life of the sage: he, too, will at the very least have to eat, drink, and have sexual intercourse. The wise person will be able to assess these impulses as bad, or at least indifferent (whereas the ordinary man will be overpowered by their excessive violence); he will not pursue them, but if they occur they will not disturb him at all.²⁵

²⁵ Cf. Long-Sedley [see n.7], I 421, who qualify the indifferent pleasures as the 'entirely involuntary or unavoidable by-products of natural human behaviour'. The problem with this account is that there is no reason to call this judgment about an indifferent as indifferent a 'pleasure' (although the quoted sources do make this inference). Maybe this 'pleasant sensation' is to be understood as a mere presentation of a present good without any assent to the presentation. In this case, it will not lead to a judgment and so there will not be a *πάθος*, nor a *εὐπάθεια*. It just remains a 'shock' (*πληγή*, or *ictus*). I owe this idea to a personal communication of R. Sorabji. In this case, then, the indifferent pleasure could, perhaps, be considered as a kind of

This Stoic doctrine was echoed in Neo-Platonism, as an elaboration of Plato's incitation (in the *Theaetetus* 176a-b) to flee from this world. Plotinus reaffirms the Stoic ideal of the sage whose happiness is not disturbed by external fortunes or misfortunes (sickness, lack, death, health, and even sense perception *tout court*).²⁶ In his conception, this means that we should leave the level of the body behind us, and strive for a full realization of our 'higher' soul:

"So we must 'flee from here' [*Theaet.* 176 a 8 – b 1] and 'separate' [*Phaedo* 67 c 6] ourselves from what has been added to us, and not be the composite thing, the ensouled body in which the nature of body (which has some trace of soul) has the greater power." (Plot. *Enn.* II 3, 9.20-23)

This does not mean that our bodily existence is altogether bad,²⁷ although it should be added that the care for the body at least hinders the zest to strive for the higher.²⁸

In Porphyry we find this idea in the statement that the sensible world is always trying to lead us astray, and that we must therefore pay no attention to it at all. After quoting the passage from the *Theaetetus* (173 c – 174 a) in which Plato describes the inability of the philosopher to adapt to this world, Porphyry explains that this comes down to the following:

"In these words Plato says that one remains impassive to these things [i.e., the sensible world] and out of their reach, not by descending to them, but by not lowering oneself to any of them."²⁹

This Neo-Platonic solution of fleeing from this world was attractive to the younger Augustine: in his *Soliloquiae*, he makes Reason say the following:

"I can give you only one advise, for I know no other: we ought to flee entirely from these sensible things, and we should carefully beware, while we bear this body, that our feathers are not hindered by their glue. For we need to have our feathers intact and perfect, in order to fly away from this darkness, towards the light over there.

'preliminary affection' (προπάθεια), which is an 'unchosen bodily reaction to which even the sage remains liable' (as defined by Price, *Op. cit.* [see n.7], 162). On Augustine's cognitive interpretation of these προπάθειαι: see Sarah C. Byers, "Augustine and the Cognitive Cause of Stoic 'Preliminary Passions' (*Propatheiai*)", in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 41 (2003), 433-448.

²⁶ See I 4, 3-16.

²⁷ This is affirmed at IV 8, 6-7.

²⁸ See, e.g., III 6, 5.1-10.

²⁹ Porph., *De abstin.* I 37, trans. Clark, modified.

That light does not even deign to show itself to those imprisoned in this cave, unless they were capable of breaking it open or destroying it, so that they can evade to the rays of that light."³⁰

In his later works, Augustine rejects this world-resignation, and looking back in the *Retractationes*, he recognizes that in his earlier works, he was too much influenced by a bad maxim of Porphyry.³¹ This entails that he changed his view on the role of the body in the passions. In line with his overall positive view on the nature of the body, he comes to a new view on the interaction of body and soul, without, however, rejecting the basic Platonic premises of the doctrine.

Augustine's new view is original: passions are not bad per se; it all depends on the moral orientation of the one who undergoes them. As a consequence, the ambiguity of the traditional definition of the passions vanishes: a passion is no longer per definition a morally bad reaction of the soul. Instead, a passion is in se neutral, and receives its moral value from the intention of the agent. The central point of the shifting emphasis is the role of *voluntas*: it is the orientation of the will that determines whether a passion is good or bad.

In *De civitate Dei* IX, Augustine discusses the pagan philosophical theories of passions: the Platonists³² (also termed Peripatetics here), who plead for a moderation of the passions, over against the Stoics who wanted to eradicate them. Augustine agrees with the suggestion of Cicero, that the discussion between Platonists and Stoics concerned only the wording, and not the doctrine itself: they all agreed that the mind of the wise man is not afflicted by passions. Thus, Virgil described his hero Aeneas as shedding tears without actually being afflicted: *mens inmota mota manet, lacrimae volvuntur inanes*.³³ As opposed to this pagan view, Augustine then proceeds to expound the Christian doctrine: a Christian can be afflicted, e.g., by the sorrow of someone else. The central question to be asked, then, is not *whether* pious persons can be caught by anger, fear, or sadness, but *on what grounds* they are passionate.

³⁰ Solil. I, XIV: *Unum est quod tibi possum praecipere; nihil plus novi: penitus esse ista sensibilia fugienda, cavendumque magnopere, dum hoc corpus agimus, ne quo eorum visco pennae nostrae impediatur, quibus integris perfectisque opus est, ut ad illam lucem ab his tenebris evolemus: quae se ne ostendere quidem dignatur in hac cavea inclusis, nisi tales fuerint ut ista vel effracta vel dissoluta possint in auras suas evadere.* Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 246 c-d, and, of course, *Resp.* VII, 514 a – 517 a.

³¹ *Retract.* I, IV, 3.

³² This does not concern the Neoplatonists, but the Platonists to whom Cicero (who is Augustine's main source here) is referring; for the Neoplatonists agreed with the Stoics on this matter.

³³ Virgil, *Eneid* IV 449; quoted at *Civ. Dei* IX, IV, 3.

In other words, it is not bad to be passionate, but you must be passionate for the right reason. If so, for instance, if you have compassion (*compassio*, which comes down to *misericordia*, being caught in our hearts by the misery of someone else), your compassion makes you more *humane* (*humanius*). Thus, Augustine asserts that right passions (i.e., passions that serve right reason) are good, and even that they are virtues rather than vices.³⁴

Contrary to what Augustine suggests, this idea is not altogether opposed to what the pagan philosophers had maintained. In the first place, of course, throwing together the Platonists and the Peripatetics is not quite doing justice to the latter, and especially on the subject of the passions, where the Aristotelian idea of *μετριοπάθεια* is about to play a central role – we will have to come back to this, for the influence of Aristotle is too big to be neglected. Moreover, in the Stoics and in the Neo-Platonists alike, the theory of the passions exceeds the borders of a harsh rejection of emotions. For indeed, even the most vivid opponent to passions (including pleasure and desire) will have to argue that, in the end, his own life choice is the most desirable, and promises the purest and finest kind of pleasure.

Thus, Stoics and Neo-Platonists did accept a transposition of the passions to a rational level, i.e., to the life of the wise, who will have these motions without being led astray by them. These “good affects” or *εὐπάθειαι* are threefold: joy (*χαρά*), will (*βούλησις*), and carefulness (*εὐλάβεια*), as a transposition of pleasure, desire, and fear. An equivalent to the fourth principal passion, pain, is not accepted, since the wise person is not susceptible to pain whatsoever. He will rightly assess pain as something indifferent or bad altogether.

These *εὐπάθειαι* are not mentioned in the ninth book of *De civitate Dei*, but they are addressed in the fourteenth book. Augustine here argues that all pagan philosophers chose a life *secundum carnem* – which is not a life devoted to corporeal lusts, but the life of someone who has turned himself (body and soul) away from his divine destination, and takes himself to be the measure (*secundum seipsum*). In doing so, he becomes like the devil, who owes his wickedness to his ambition to take the place of God. The list of pagan philosophers includes Epicureans and Stoics, as well as the Platonists, who maintain that the origin of evil lies in the corporeal nature. Augustine again deduces this from Virgil, whom he interprets by Platonising

³⁴ *Civ. Dei* IX, V.

him,³⁵ connecting his words *clausae tenebris et carcere caeco*³⁶ to a Neo-Platonic rendering of the Platonic idea of the body as a prison or chain of the soul (*Phaedo* 82 e). Thus, Augustine concludes, according to the Platonists, the origin of vice lies in the earthly organs and mortal limbs, which cause the passions.

But the Platonists are a case apart: they do recognise, Augustine says, that the corporeal nature is not evil in se, since it is formed by God. As a consequence, the passions do not stem from the body as such, and can even exist in the purified soul, after the corruption of the body. Augustine makes this point by referring to (a Platonising interpretation of) Virgil. But it is true that the "real" Platonists said this. As we have pointed out already, Plotinus held that the passions can be situated only in the ensouled body, the combination (τὸ συνναμφότερον³⁷) of lower soul and body. At *Enn.* I 8, Plotinus states that the soul can only be associated with the body when it descends to 'lower nature' (χείρων φύσις): only in this case fear, desire, distress, and anger (θυμοί) can come to be. They all reveal a certain situation of the combination (σύνθετον, or σύστασις) body-soul: fear that the combination will be resolved, distress when it is resolved, etc. (I 8, 15.14-18). Porphyry even strengthened the idea by insisting on the Platonic statement that the soul can even become corporeal, when it is too much nailed to the body (*Phaedo* 83 d).³⁸

This is a hint which Augustine takes very seriously: in the end, the Platonists agree that passions can only arise in the combination of body and soul; they do not depend on the body as such. This brings him to his main point: if the corporeal nature as such is not responsible for the passions – or in any case, for the passions' being evil –, then the corporeal impulses as such are not bad. Rather, their possible badness is the result of the soul's attitude towards them. That is to say, they can as well be good, if the soul has a good intention. The central hinge of the value of the passions is the orientation of the will. The four main passions (pleasure, pain, desire and fear) are vicious, if

³⁵ Cf. P. Courcelle, «Interprétations néo-platonisantes du livre VI de l'*Enéide*», in *Recherches sur la tradition platonicienne* (Entretiens Fond. Hardt, III), Vandoeuvres, Genève, 1955, 95-136.

³⁶ *Eneid* VI 734; *Civ. Dei* XIV, III, 2.

³⁷ Cf. Plato, *Alc.* I 130 a 9.

³⁸ Cf. Porph., *De abst.* I 31 and 38, where the "nail" mentioned in the *Phaedo* is identified as sense perception, which fixes the soul to bodily pleasure. At I 57, the image is reversed, describing the final goal of nailing our soul to the higher realm.

and only if the will is bad. If the will is good (*recta*), then the passions are not only excusable, but even praiseworthy.³⁹

The elaborated notion of the will is here taking over the role formerly attributed to the *attentio*: all motions of the passionate soul are *voluntates*. Augustine makes this very clear by reformulating the Stoic definition of the four main passions:

“When we approve of striving for the things we want, we speak of a desire, when we approve of enjoying the things we want, we speak of a pleasure. In the same way, when we disapprove of a thing which we do not want to happen, then this kind of will is fear, and when we disapprove of something which happens to us against our will, then this kind of will is distress.”⁴⁰

Augustine here sustains the Stoic theory of a passion being the result of the assent (*συγκατάθεσις*) given to an impulse, but by the addition of the notion of *voluntas*, the Stoic terminology is actually turned upside down: the Stoics put the emphasis on the value of the object of our passion, determining a passion as a wrong assessment of this objective value. The Augustinian *voluntas* changes the mode entirely towards our subjective attitude: the moral value of the things we want depends on the moral value of our will. Hence, it must be possible that passions also occur in a morally good sense, in people who live *secundum Deum* and are *amatores boni*. Their good will (*bona voluntas*, or *amor*, or *caritas*) causes good passions. This claim is corroborated by references to Scriptural passages, showing that the pious do have longings, joys and fears. These are the Stoic *εὐπάθειαι*, or *constantiae*: the transpositions of the passions to a level at which reason keeps control, and is not led astray by irrational movements. As we have seen, the Stoics do not accept a rational equivalent of the fourth passion, pain. But Augustine does not agree: he points out that a good man can be sad, when he recognises that he has sinned. The Stoics are right, Augustine says, in this sense, that the true wise does not commit sins, and thus, that he cannot have this *tristitia*. But even then, Augustine adds, the *cives sanctae civitatis* (i.e., the Christian wise) can be sad, when they contrast their present state to the expected divine adoption and redemption of the body, or when

³⁹ Civ. Dei XIV, VI: *Interest autem qualis sit voluntas hominis; quia si perversa est, perversos habebit hos motus; si autem recta est, non solum inculpabiles, verum etiam laudabiles erunt.*

⁴⁰ Civ. Dei XIV, VI: *Cum consentimus appetendo ea quae volumus, cupiditas; cum autem consentimus fruendo his quae volumus, laetitia vocatur. Itemque cum dissentimus ab eo quod accidere nolumus, talis voluntas metus est, cum autem dissentimus ab eo quod nolentibus accidit, talis voluntas tristitia est.*

they commit sin (for thinking that one is without sin is a sinful lie), and when they are tempted (*Civ. Dei* XIV, IX, 1). In sum, a true Christian has good passions (just as Christ himself could shed tears, be anxious, or be compassionate), passions which are in accordance with right reason (*recta ratio*).

It is important to note that Augustine here actually departs from the Stoic doctrine of εὐπάθεια. The Stoic *constantiae* are not passions, since the wise man's life is marked by the strictest ἀπάθεια. Εὐπάθεια is ἀπάθεια: a stable state of the wise man's mind, which allows him to avoid passionate motions. The only thing that happens in εὐλάβεια, χαρά, and βούλησις is a physiological process of broadening of the soul, whereas in a passion, a physiological reaction goes together with a darkening of the power of reason, on the basis of a wrong judgment about a certain impulse's being preferable or not. In the εὐπάθειαι, this latter effect is excluded, since they are good reactions to the recognition of a good impulse's being good. In Augustine's perspective, however, the *constantiae* are reinterpreted as *genuine* passions: the pious man is not ἀπαθής; he does feel fear, pleasure, compassion, etc., albeit as a result of his good will and in accordance with right reason.

As a matter of fact, Augustine's reinterpretation is not Stoic at all any more. Rather, Augustine's viewpoint is in line with that of Aristotle, though expressed in a Stoic terminology. For Augustine echoes Aristotle's overall aim to exercise μετριοπάθεια, tempering the passions as a result of employing right reason – and for Aristotle, right reason is the measure of virtue (*Nicomachean Ethics* II 4).⁴¹ Of course, the Stoics also referred to “right reason” in order to indicate εὐπάθεια. But it is important to note the difference between the two accounts. For the Stoics, reason which is not hindered by external impulses is always “right reason”; the rational powers as such are always good. For Augustine, on the other hand, “right reason” is opposed to a bad orientation of reason. According to him, it is possible to be entirely rational without being good (for example, in the exercise of the *prudentia carnis*). Thus, the “righteousness” of reason is not guaranteed once our rational faculty takes control. Hence, a life devoted to reason is not per se good. It can be either good or bad. And in both cases, it is susceptible to passions.

⁴¹ It is true that Augustine refers to this μετριοπάθεια in a negative way, when he says that some people are able to moderate their passions, but are so proud and boasting because of their lack of piety, that they are caught by another, even worse evil (*Civ. Dei* XIV, IX, 6). This is not to say that μετριοπάθεια is bad in se: it comes down to the overall reproach that the pagans, even those who have high moral standards, always fall prey to *superbia*, which turns their virtues into vices.

Augustine thus rejects the entire idea of ἀπάθεια altogether. This rejection of ἀπάθεια, however, does not come down to the claim that the soul does have passions after all. I think Augustine always remains true to the doctrine that the soul *in se* does not have passions. The rebuttal of ἀπάθεια rather means that the absence of passions cannot be a healthy state for a living being that has a bodily existence. If there is a body involved, then impassibility is an unattainable and undesirable state. Apart from this, the view of the way in which body and soul are combined, remains unchanged.

In any case, Augustine leaves open a possible ἀπάθεια in the life after Redemption: freedom from passions is good and highly choice worthy, he says, but not in our present life.⁴² For our sinful state needs passions; we *must* feel anger and fear in order to avoid sins, and we *must* be able to be compassionate. A life without passions would be a state of reproachable, inhumane, insensibility, even worse than vice (*Civ. Dei* XIV, IX, 4).⁴³

Thus, Augustine leaves the Stoic theory behind. He allows for a positive notion of the passions (which he introduces as a reinterpretation of the Stoic εὐπάθειαι). Doing so, he avoids a riddle inherent to the Stoic doctrine. Indeed, eventually, it is very difficult for a Stoic to argue for a qualitative difference between the passions and the εὐπάθειαι. On this point, there was a great controversy among the Stoics themselves. The standard theory, established by Chrysippus, held that joy and pleasure stem from the same impulse, which, in the case of pleasure, becomes 'excessive', thus going beyond the rational proportion.⁴⁴ In this case, then, there is no difference in kind between pleasure and joy. The only difference is that pleasure exceeds the limits set by rational choice. But, then, it is difficult to explain how an impulse becomes excessive: how are we to decide where the limit lies between a movement that is reasonable and a movement that breaks out of the limits set by reason? Probably on the ground of this kind of objections, Posidonius strongly disagreed with the standard Stoic doctrine. He rejected Chrysippus' unitary view of the soul, and returned to the Platonic, threefold division of the psyche. He thus drew an opposition

⁴² *Civ. Dei* XIV, IX, 4: *bona plane et maxime optanda, sed nec ipsa huius est vitae.*

⁴³ On the inhumane character of that state: *Ibid.* XIV, IX, 6.

⁴⁴ Galen, *Plac.* 4.2.10-18 (Long-Sedley 65J; *SVF* 3.462). The example given by Long-Sedley [see n.7] I GHGGHG420 is illuminating: they compare right rational proportion to the setting of a speed limit. What is below the limit is in accordance with reason, what goes beyond it is excessive and passionate.

between reason and the irrational parts of the soul,⁴⁵ which had important repercussions for the theory of passions. For it enabled him to maintain that an impulse is brought along either by reason or by the irrational part of the soul. In the former case, the impulse leads to εὐπάθεια (or joy in particular), while in the latter case it will result in a passion (viz., pleasure). This entails a difference in kind between pleasure and joy, corresponding to the difference of the faculties from which they originate. This was the version of Stoicism that was the most influential in the Platonic schools, and the Neo-Platonic reformulation rests on this Posidonian theory.

Augustine, for his part, is able to avoid this discussion on the exact difference between εὐπάθεια and passions: for him, passions and *constantiae* are just qualitatively identical. They all fall under one and the same account of “a passion”; the goodness of the *constantiae* is not depending on criteria within the *constantiae* themselves, but rather on the orientation of the will of the person who has the passions.

4. The Passions in the Afterlife

As we have seen, Augustine pushes ἀπάθεια back, away from our present life, accusing the Stoics of propagating an inhumane lack of sensibility. Does this mean, then, that ἀπάθεια finds its proper place in the afterlife? Augustine seems to accept that, in the texts we have been following until now: he admits that we need passions for the sake of our sinful existence, adding that ἀπάθεια is good and choice worthy, though not in this life.

However, Augustine proceeds by modifying this statement. In a first move, he goes on stating that the *perfecta beatitudo* is without fear and distress, but, surprisingly, and without preparation, he suddenly raises the following question: “Who would say, without entirely missing the truth, that there will not be love (*amor*) and joy (*gaudium*) in that life?”⁴⁶ This *Deus ex machina* – if I may use this expression – is striking, and shows the immense hesitation of Augustine as to whether ἀπάθεια would ever be desirable. Moreover, he immediately revokes his judgment about the absence of fear, arguing that there is likely to be a *timor castus* in the afterlife: a fear that

⁴⁵ Galen took over this view, and used Posidonius to criticize Chrysippus; cf. Long-Sedley I 422-423.

⁴⁶ *Civ. Dei* XIV, IX, 4.

keeps us away from sin (not by a sorrow about any weakness, but by the tranquillity of our love). In any case, distress and fear *stricto sensu* are dropped from the list of passions in the redeemed life, and only two passions are left over: *gaudium* and *amor*. The reason for this selection is to be sought in the loss of mortality.⁴⁷ A mortal pleasure and desire are always coloured by the possibility of losing their object. Hence, in the mortal state, we must include the opposite affects of distress and fear, which are implied by the possibility of the loss. Any experience of pleasure in this mortal life goes together with a possible pain, which is its starting point (pleasure occurring when a lack is remedied), and which will become actual when the object of our pleasure is lost. And, correspondingly, every desire implies fear, since the wish to attain the object goes together with the possibility that the object will ever be lost, if indeed it is attained at all.

In the immortal state, to the contrary, this possibility of losing the object of pleasure and desire is excluded: we shall always be present with the object of our longing, and we shall always enjoy this presence, without, however, getting so united to it that our desire would come to an end. The immortal *gaudium* and *amor* are rooted in a desire that is never fully satisfied, despite its eternal and perfect satisfaction. Contrary to its pagan Neo-Platonic counterpart, the Augustinian final unity never does away with alterity. The will does not come to rest, not even when it finds its ultimate and final destination in the vision of God.⁴⁸

On the basis of what has been said before concerning the interaction of body and soul, one can now explain why this redeemed state still has passions: after all, it remains a corporeal state, and hence, passions are unavoidable in this state as well. In the end, it is due to this corporeality that we will never merge together with the object of our contemplation. Our bodily existence, even in the afterlife, is the cause of the impossibility of doing away with alterity.

With this view of the passions in the redeemed life, Augustine again complicates the matter which he had simplified before. We have seen how he brings all passions and *constantiae* together under one single heading, thus avoiding the deadlock of the Stoics about a qualitative difference between passions and ἐπάθειαι. But now, when he suddenly accepts only two passions in the afterlife, I think the difficulty returns as a boomerang. The reason why the two counterparts to joy and love are excluded is clear enough. But the fact that

⁴⁷ I wish to thank Bernard Bruning, who brought this point to my attention.

⁴⁸ *De Trin.* XI, 6, 10.

only these two passions are left, without their counterparts, implies an essential modification of those two passions. Indeed, there is an immense difference between having a pleasure in contrast to pain, and having a pleasure without the possibility of pain. And the same goes, *mutatis mutandis*, for desire. Thus, the qualitative difference that Augustine denied between passion and εὐπάθεια is replaced by a qualitative difference between the passions in this life (no matter whether they are *secundum carnem* –i.e., passions– or *secundum Deum* –i.e., *constantiae*–) and the passions in the afterlife. In the final section, I want to make this point with reference to pleasure, as a kind of test case for the entire doctrine of passions.

5. Pleasure (and Pain?)

One of the main features of the Augustinian theory of sense perception is the central role attributed to pleasure and pain. We pointed out already that a sense perception always either is a pleasure or a pain. There are states in which we do not have pleasure or pain, but these are states in which we simply do not have sense perception at all. With this statement, Augustine is in line with Plato (as argued before) and with Aristotle, for whom pleasure is a natural or physiological sign that everything is “all right”, whereas pain is a signal that something is going wrong.

This overall idea is expressed in the following, clear-cut definitions of pleasure and pain:

“What is the so-called bodily pain, but a sudden corruption of the healthy state of that which the soul, by making a wrong use of it, brought to corruption? And what is the so-called spiritual pain, but the privation of perishable things which the soul enjoyed or hoped to enjoy?” (*De vera relig.* XII, 23)

“Ask yourself what is captivating in bodily pleasure: you will find nothing but accordance (*convenientia*); for things that are opposing us (*resistentia*) yield pain, whereas things that are in accordance (*convenientia*) yield pleasure.” (*Ibid.* XXXIX, 72)

This is a Platonic definition, going back to Plato’s *Philebus*, where pleasure is defined as the felt restoration of a lack. On the basis of Aristotle’s view of pleasure as a natural sign, the Stoic theory of *convenientia* is coupled with this process of restoration: our first natural impulse is to preserve our life, by striving for those things that naturally supply that which is *conveniens*, i.e., in accordance with nature. When this convenience is attained, we welcome it

with pleasure. But this pleasure is exclusively linked to the restoration process; hence, it is absent in the healthy state reached after the restoration. In the tenth book of the *Confessions*, Augustine draws a distinction between *voluptas* and *salus*, exactly on the basis of this definition of pleasure: "*ipse enim transitus [sc. ex indigentiae molestia ad quietem satietatis] voluptas est*" (*Conf.* X, 44). The final state of health (*salus*) is a state of rest in satisfaction (*quies satietatis*), which is without *voluptas*. And, Augustine adds, it is in the movement towards satisfaction that all kinds of temptations occur: we tend to seek pleasure for its own sake, whereas the real goal of the pleasureable movements is the healthy state. Thus, pleasure is seen as a kind of self-destructive movement towards this state: the closer we get to satisfaction, the less pleasure we shall experience.

This is the doctrine of pleasure as we find it in the Neo-Platonic tradition. Plotinus, for instance, gives the following definition of pain and pleasure:

"Pain is consciousness of withdrawal of a body which is being deprived of the image of soul, and pleasure is the knowledge of a living being that the image of soul is again fitting itself back in the body." (IV 4, 19.2-4)

In this passage, the "image of soul" is the lower soul, which is combined with the body, and exerts vital functions: vegetation (the soul being the one who nourishes the body, "as a mother"),⁴⁹ sensation, and discursive thinking. The "higher" soul, on the other hand, does not descend into the material world, and remains eternally in the intelligible world; it does not need discursive thinking, but intuitively grasps the *νοῦς*. That the body "is deprived of the image of soul" does not mean that the combination of body and soul really is resolved. This would entail the impossibility to experience pleasure, distress, or whatsoever, since perception is one of the psychic functions⁵⁰. It rather means that the combination is threatened, and that the body is about to lose the image of soul. The harm done to the integrity of the body (which causes pain) is radically opposed to the natural function of vegetative soul, whose task it is to nourish, to cure, and to save the body. According to this analysis, pain is the awareness of the broken harmony between the actual condition of the body and the natural aim of the function of the soul; pleasure is the consciousness of the restoration of this harmony.

⁴⁹ *Enn.* IV 4, 20.25-36

⁵⁰ Cf. *Enn.* IV 4, 28.22-58.

This parallel with Plotinian texts adduces evidence that Augustine's definition of pleasure is essentially Neo-Platonic. It is on this basis that Augustine can argue that there is no qualitative difference between the pleasures – qua pleasures – of a life *secundum carnem* and a life *secundum Deum*, since both lives equally consist in a combination of body and soul. However clear this may seem at first sight, this Platonic definition of pleasure is causing problems, if we are to accept the existence of pleasure in the redeemed life, in a state where a lack will no longer exist. Indeed, the absence of a lack contradicts the very definition of pleasure as the restoration of a lack, which would entail that pleasure simply is impossible in this state. On the other hand, this state should be pleasurable, if we want to argue convincingly that it is the most desirable state of all.

Again, Augustine is by no means the first or the only author who had to cope with this typical problem. In fact, the question raised here is inherent to the entire Platonic tradition, and to Neo-Platonism in particular. In the Neo-Platonic tradition, philosophers have been struggling with the question of what was to happen, when we reach the ultimate unity: is it not likely that this state will yield the purest pleasure, without any lack or pain?⁵¹ The answer is very difficult, given the definition of pleasure. The standard Neo-Platonic view is that we shall attain a kind of “joy” that is different from genuine pleasure. At I 4 Plotinus writes the following:

“When people ask about what is pleasant in a life of the sage, they will not suppose that he should enjoy any of the pleasures of the debauchee or of the body –these cannot be present and they are destructive of happiness– or even extreme emotional pleasures of any kind –why should the good man have any?– but only those pleasures which accompany the presence of goods, i.e. pleasures that do not consist in movements or in a process of becoming: for the goods are there already, and the good man is present to himself; his pleasure and cheerfulness are at rest. The good man is always cheerful; his state is tranquil, his disposition contented and undisturbed by any so-called evils –if he is really good. If anyone looks for another kind of pleasure in the life of virtue it is not the life of virtue he is looking for. (I 4, 12.1-12, trans. Rist, combined with Armstrong)

In this passage, the “pleasure of the sage” is not to be taken literally. As Plotinus points out in one of his most important treatises, in the “good life”, which is the highest performance of our natural

⁵¹ Cf. my *Pleasure and the Good Life. Plato, Aristotle and the Neoplatonists*, Leiden (*Philosophia Antiqua*, 85), 2000.

condition, we have a kind of "pleasure". However, it is described as "a state of luminous clarity", and it is by no means a genuine pleasure, for we have left behind the affective movements of the world of becoming:

"Assuming that such a state of intellect is most pleasing and acceptable, they⁵² say that it is mixed with pleasure because they cannot find an appropriate way of speaking about it. (VI 7, 30.24-27)

If this is no genuine pleasure, then what is it? What allows us to call this a "joy"? In fact, the existence of this joy is argued by referring to a completely different definition of pleasure, which is that of Aristotle. Indeed, Aristotle said that pleasure, rather than being the restoration of a lack, is the effect of our performing an activity in a perfect way, without any hindrance. If we enjoy playing the flute, then this is not, Aristotle says, because our activity fills a lack, but because we are well performing the activity of playing the flute. The Neo-Platonists were eager to take over this Aristotelian notion of pleasure, to indicate the highest kind of pleasure: Plotinus' joy occurs exactly in the actualised life of virtue, which is said to be the unimpeded performance of our natural condition. As ever, the Neo-Platonists follow Plato as far as they can, using all other philosophical schools in order to mould the Platonic viewpoint, and finding particular resort in Aristotle, when Plato can no longer be followed. But, on the other hand, they remain true to Plato: for them, this joy cannot be a genuine pleasure, because it cannot be reconciled with the Platonic definition of pleasure as the restoration of a lack.

When Augustine takes over the Neo-Platonic definition of pleasure, he also inherits the peculiar problem of explaining the existence of a pleasure in a state without any lack. In the earlier works, Augustine seems to opt for the radical Neo-Platonic solution: there will not be any pleasure there. What we shall attain is a "neutral" condition, as outlined by Plato, and not a pleasure.⁵³ This is in line with the overall definition of pleasure as the transition towards a state of contentment.⁵⁴

⁵² One does not expect a plural form here. Clearly, Plato himself is meant in the first place. The plural, however, places the reference in a broader perspective; it may, then, imply the entire Platonic 'school', including Aristotle.

⁵³ *De mus.* VI, V, 15: *Aliud est summa stoliditate, aliud summa sanitate corporis nihil sentire. Nam in altero instrumenta desunt, quae adversus passiones corporis moveantur, in altero ipsae passiones.*

⁵⁴ Cf. *Conf.* X, 44, quoted above, and *Vera relig.* LII, 101: *quid appetit voluptas corporis nisi quietem, quae non est nisi ubi nulla est indigentia et nulla corruptio?*

Later on, however, Augustine changes his mind: pleasure is worth while in itself. As we have seen, the *gaudium* in the redeemed life is a pleasure without any possible distress. This is in line with his acceptance of the passions in the good life. But this does not mean that he is leaving the overall Platonic framework. For the question of how to say that this *gaudium* can be called a pleasure is addressed by taking over peculiar Neo-Platonic schemes. Augustine will make his point by stating that there are two kinds of "*quies*": one is the result of satiation, and occurs after the pleasurable movement, while the other occurs "when we find our joy in the Lord" (*delectare in domino*), according to the word of the Psalmist. The latter kind is true rest: the satiation of the body can never be eternal nor even longlasting, whereas enjoying God is an everlasting rest.⁵⁵ But how can this rest be enjoyable? We find an answer to this question in the *De Trinitate*. After having indicated (in the eleventh book) that our will can take a rest when a partial goal is achieved, and that we can enjoy this (partial) rest,⁵⁶ Augustine points out (in the fifteenth book) that our will is accomplished or perfected (*perficitur*) when it attains what it was tending to, and when it takes rest in this attainment. The result of this is that the desire of the one who was seeking (*appetitus quaerentis*) is modified into the love of the one who feels joy (*amor fruientis*).⁵⁷ Hence, the joy of *frui* consists in the perfection of the will (*voluntas*), when it attains its final goal. This may seem paradoxical, since at first sight it entails that the will is perfect when it comes to its end. But that is not what is meant here: when the will attains its final object, and thus finds its rest in God, the will does not cease. Playing on the words, one could say that the will does not come to its end when it attains its end. Rather, it finds its rest in the attainment, but the activity of willing continues. The attainment modifies the character of the activity, from desire (of that which is not present yet) to love (of that which is present), and the affect changes correspondingly: from *voluptas* (in the movement) to *frui* (at rest).⁵⁸

Thus, we can conclude that when Augustine transposes pleasure to the state of the redeemed body, he is doing the same as the pagan Neo-Platonists: he follows Aristotle rather than Plato. The

⁵⁵ *Ep.* 55.18.

⁵⁶ *De Trin.* XI, VI, 10.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* XV, XXVI, 47.

⁵⁸ Cf. Augustine's definition of *frui* at *De Trin.* X, X, 13: *frui-mur cognit-is, in quibus voluntas ipsa propter se ipsa delectata conquiescit.*

notion of *gaudium* rests on the Aristotelian definition of pleasure as the supplementary effect of an unimpeded activity, namely, of the perfect activity of the will that has attained its final goal. That is what makes *voluptas* (the pleasure in this life, being the restoration of a lack) different in kind from *gaudium*, or from *frui Deo*.

1. Introduction

Gerd VAN RIEL

1.1. Anthropological optimism in Christianity?

As far as directives concerning the good life are concerned, philosophy and Christianity do not appear to agree. Philosophical ideas concerning this theme have always been viewed with suspicion by Christian leaders because human nature was represented in a too rosy colour and divine grace had no part in redemption.

Thus, Origen was condemned at the Council of Constantinople in 553. Origen was regarded capable of eliminating by himself the results of the fall of man and capable of rediscovering the personal god(s).¹ The optimistic view of mankind must have appealed to the Christian humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam. He once remarked that he learned more from one page of Origen than ten pages of Augustine.² Erasmus' opinion was based on the fact that Origen lets mankind show through, while Erasmus had studied those sections from Augustine's work where mankind is represented as disorganised and not able to reach God's grace. Despite Erasmus' great influence on Church and society, Augustine remained the greatest of the great. Not Origen, who had as opponents what mankind did and was indebted to pagan philosophy. The 16th-century doctor and later Cardinal, de Jong remarked that Origen's spirit was indeed endangered due to Philosophy (Plato in *Timaeus* and the much influenced by Philosophy (Plato and Stoic). The text here agrees with the quote from Porphyry which Buschius had included in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

¹ 'Plus me docet christianae philosophiae Irenaeus Origenis pagina quam deum Augustinus', Erasmus, *opere selecta*, Vol. III, 1, 157, quoted in: A.J.M. Davids, *Patrologie en patrologie. Ontwikkelingen naar aanleiding van Eusebius' geschiedenis van de Oude Kerk. Rede uitgegeven ter gelegenheid van het afscheid als hoogleraar in de Patrologie, Pastoraat en Spiritualiteit aan de Katholieke Universiteit van de Theologie van de Katholieke Universiteit Groningen op vrijdag 22 augustus 2002* (Nijmegen 2002), 8.